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AUTHOR	Dekovic, Maja
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ABSTRACT

One of the most important tasks of childhood is to develop and maintain socially competent relationships with peers. Some children are easily accepted and liked by their peers, while other children experience problems in their relationship with peers and are rejected by the peer group. This book provides a comprehensive overview of the factors that cause or contribute to the development of peer acceptance or rejection. In addition to the child's social behavior and social cognition, special attention is given to the child's family and the aspects of the parent-child relationship that are important for acquiring competence needed for successful peer-relations. The book also describes a recently completed study of children's level of social cognitive development and prosocial behavior as a predictor of peer status, and parents' cognitive and behavioral functioning as a predictor of children's level of social cognitive development and social behavior. Results indicate that: (1) the maturity in reasoning about the social world, positive orientation toward others, and sensitivity to others' distress are salient characteristics of children who are popular in their peer group at school; (2) the differences between popular and rejected children seem to increase with age; and (3) parents who are able to view the parent-child relationship at a higher level, who are supportive of their children, and who tend to use more indirect rather than restrictive control to influence their child's behavior, are more likely to have socially competent children. The book also offers guidelines for planning and implementing successful interventions and for helping children who experience problems with peer relations. (HTH)

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